



STATE OF VERMONT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND
WELFARE

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MEMORANDUM

To: Senator Jane Kitchel, Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations

From: Senator Ginny Lyons, Chair, Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

Date: March 15, 2021

Subject: H.315 recommendations

The Senate Committee on Health and Welfare has reviewed and taken testimony on H.315, An act relating to COVID-19 relief, as passed by the House, and we have several recommendations. We also want to identify additional areas of interest that we would like to continue to explore with the Senate Committee on Appropriations for potential inclusion in the FY22 budget bill.

H.315 Recommendations

Grants to Reach Up Participants

The Committee on Health and Welfare supports appropriating \$1.3 million to continue providing additional financial support to families participating in the Reach Up program, as proposed in H.315. We defer to the Committee on Appropriations in determining the proper source of funds for this appropriation.

Purchase and Distribution of Diapers

The Committee on Health and Welfare recommends appropriating \$82,000 to the Department for Children and Families for a grant to the Vermont Food Bank to purchase and distribute diapers to Vermonters in need.

Recovery Centers

The Committee on Health and Welfare recommends appropriating \$240,000 to the Department of Health for the recovery centers in the Vermont Recovery Center Network. This would work out to be a \$20,000 grant to each of the 12 recovery centers to help address the increased demand for substance use disorder treatment services, and thus increased caseload, that these centers have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Designated and Specialized Service Agencies; Housing (Supports)

The Committee on Health and Welfare recommends making amendments to Secs. 4 and 5 of H.315 as passed by the House, which address housing issues and the designated and specialized service agencies. The Committee suggests the following revisions to the House-passed language (changes from the House bill are highlighted and in bold):

Sec. __. DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH; HOUSING **SUPPORTS**

The sum of \$4,000,000.00 is appropriated from the **General Fund American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 – Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund** to the Department of Mental Health in fiscal year 2021 for grants to Vermont Care Partners and other stakeholder organizations to **provide housing supports make existing housing and community-based facilities providing mental health services more accessible, safe, and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, or to expand housing opportunities** in community settings, **or both**. The Department shall select the projects in consultation with **the Agency of Human Services Secretary's Office; the Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living; and** representatives of the designated agencies, specialized service agencies, and peer organizations. The grants shall be awarded to organizations that demonstrate the greatest ability to respond immediately to the need for housing **supports** and shall be for projects that will not require additional State funds for operating costs in future years or that can redirect current expenditures, or both. To the greatest extent possible, grants shall be awarded for projects in underserved areas of the State. At least one grant shall be awarded to a peer-run or peer-directed housing organization. **The Department of Mental Health shall partner with the Agency of Human Services Secretary's Office and the Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living to identify ways to include as potential grant candidates those specialized service agencies that do not provide**

mental health services. In addition, the Department, in consultation with the designated agencies, specialized service agencies, and peer organizations, shall give priority. Priority shall be given to proposed projects that meet one or more of the following criteria:

(1) create movement within the current system of care, such as those that would move individuals out of hospitals and other restrictive settings and back into a community setting; and

(2) focus on equity and on providing patient-centered care; and

(3) employ or build on successful, evidence-based models of supportive housing.

Sec. __. DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH; DESIGNATED AND
SPECIALIZED SERVICE AGENCIES; CASE MANAGEMENT
SERVICES

The sum of \$850,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Mental Health in fiscal year 2021 to provide funds to the designated and specialized service agencies to enable them each to hire an additional case manager to provide case management services to Vermont residents who may not previously have been part of an agency's caseload but whose lives have been significantly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and who are now urgently in need of these agencies' supports. The Department shall partner with the Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living to identify ways to fund the priority case management needs of specialized service agencies that do not provide mental health services.

Afterschool and Summer Programming

The Committee on Health and Welfare recommends appropriating \$4 million for afterschool and summer and programming as follows:

Sec. __. DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES; AFTERSCHOOL AND
SUMMER PROGRAMMING

The sum of \$4,000,000.00 is appropriated from the funds provided to the State by the Sec. 2001 of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Pub. L. No. 117-2, to the Department for Children and Families for distribution to the Afterschool for All program. These funds shall be used for grants to afterschool and summer programs that meet the requirements of Section 2001(f)(2) or (3), or both, of the federal Act.

Vermont Relay Conference Captioning

The Committee on Health and Welfare recommends appropriating \$50,000 to the Department of Public Service to restore the Vermont Relay Conference Captioning (RCC) service, which provides free captioning for video and conference calls for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Department shut off the service after expending all of the funding it had allocated for that purpose and needs these funds to restore the service.

Preliminary FY 2022 Budget Recommendations

The following are preliminary budget recommendations from the Committee on Health and Welfare that we are providing at this time both for informational purposes and in the event that the Committee on Appropriations thinks one or more of these recommendations is more appropriate for inclusion in H.315.

Long-Term Care Facilities

The Committee on Health and Welfare is interested in exploring the potential use of federal housing rental funds to provide support to long-term care facilities that use lease agreements and that lost revenue during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Addressing homelessness and ending reliance on motel vouchers

The Committee on Health and Welfare recommends identifying opportunities to use federal funds to make capital investments to address issues relating to individuals who are experiencing homelessness and to provide them with necessary related supports.

Primary Care Workforce Development

The Committee on Health and Welfare recommends appropriating funds in the FY22 budget bill to further develop Vermont's primary care workforce by investing monies to recruit and retain high-quality primary care providers in all areas of the State, especially those areas that have a significant shortage of primary care providers who are taking new patients.

Foster Parents

The Committee on Health and Welfare recommends that the Committee on Appropriations consider providing additional financial support to Vermont's foster parents in the FY22 budget bill.

COVID-19 Vaccines

The Committee on Health and Welfare does not have a specific funding recommendation at this time, but we have concerns regarding COVID-19 vaccine distribution in underserved areas of the State, especially in Essex and Orleans Counties. We wanted to call the Committee on Appropriations' attention to this issue and the potential need for the Department of Health or another entity to offer vaccination clinics, mobile vaccine administration, or other methods in order to ensure that Vermonters in rural areas have appropriate access the COVID-19 vaccine. We will continue to monitor this issue and may have a funding recommendation to provide for the FY22 budget bill.